Facts About Male Condoms and the Correct Way to Use Them

What is a male condom?
A male condom, also called a “rubber” or “prophylactic”, is a covering worn over the penis during intercourse.

Why use a male condom?
Male condoms help protect against pregnancy and fluid-borne sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection, chlamydia, and gonorrhea. They protect less well against STIs that are spread by skin contact such as herpes, genital warts and human papillomavirus (HPV).

By protecting against STIs a woman can help protect her health, preserve her ability to have children, and protect her baby while pregnant. Men also protect themselves from getting STIs by using condoms. Although condoms can be used alone for pregnancy prevention, women who use other birth control methods such as oral contraceptives, diaphragm, etc. should also use condoms if they are at risk of STIs.

Buying Condoms
Condoms are available in supermarkets, drug stores, and convenience stores without a prescription. Packages of condoms are often readily displayed so that you do not need to ask a pharmacist or clerk for assistance. Condoms are also available through family planning clinics and are sold through the mail and in vending machines in rest rooms. Embarrassment about asking for condoms should not prevent you from obtaining them.

Types of Male Condoms
Modern condoms are made from three materials: latex (rubber), polyurethane (a strong, thin plastic), and processed animal tissue (skin). Latex condoms offer the best protection from many STIs and HIV because the synthetic rubber prevents bacteria and viruses from passing through. Evidence also suggests that polyurethane plastic condoms can help prevent STIs. Plastic condoms are best for couples with latex allergy or whenever a woman is using a vaginal cream or suppository for treatment of infection. Animal skin condoms, on the other hand, have larger microscopic openings and may allow the organisms that cause STIs to pass through and infect either partner.

Condoms come in a variety of shapes and vary in thickness and how snugly they fit. Although many are about the same size, larger sized condoms with more “head room” or longer length are available. They may be colored, textured, lubricated or nonlubricated, or contain spermicide or no spermicide. Spermicide, however, does not add to pregnancy prevention and won’t help prevent getting an STI.

Still other types of condoms are available. Some have a nipple-shaped end to catch semen, while others do not. When using a condom without the nipple-end, a half-inch space must be left at the end to catch semen. Some condoms claim to be “desensitizing” to help men maintain their erections longer.
Care and Storage of Condoms

The date on the package is the date of manufacture. With proper care, condoms without spermicide can be opened and used (once) up to 5 years from this date. Store condoms in a cool, dry place. Like other rubber products, latex condoms may be damaged if exposed to heat. Buy enough of a supply so that you do not run out unexpectedly.

Correct Condom Use

Putting On the Condom

- Remove the condom from the package.
- Look at how the condom will unroll (most condoms unroll one way only).
- Leave 1/4” to 1/2” of space at the tip of the condom to hold the semen (this will be unnecessary if a nipple-ended condom is used). Make sure there is no air in the condom.
- Roll the condom down on the erect penis, avoiding an air pocket at the tip (see illustration). Either partner can put the condom on as part of foreplay. Men with foreskin should pull back the foreskin before the condom is rolled onto the penis.
- Handle the condom carefully. Be sure not to tear with a fingernail or tooth.

Taking Off the Condom

1. After orgasm (coming), but before the penis gets soft, firmly grasp the rim of the condom at the base of the penis.
2. Withdraw the penis from the vagina while holding onto the rim of the condom.
3. Be careful not to let semen from the condom spill on hands or partner’s body. Semen that comes in contact with the outer part of the vagina could cause pregnancy or an STI.
4. Inspect the condom for possible holes or breaks. If the condom has broken, the woman should call her clinician to discuss emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy. If she is 18 years of age or older and thinks she is going to get pregnant, she can get emergency contraception at a pharmacy without a prescription.
5. Remove the condom and dispose of safely.
6. Use another condom if further penile-vaginal contact or penetration is desired.

Special Reminders

- Use water-soluble lubricants, if needed.
- Do not use oil-based lubricants such as petroleum jelly or mineral or vegetable oils with latex rubber condoms. These products can harm the condom, causing it to tear or break.
- Do not carry condoms in hip pocket or wallet, or store in a glove compartment. Heat may damage them.
- Do not use a male condom with a female condom.
- Never use a condom more than once.